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AUTHOR Attwood, Peter
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ABSTRACT

An approach to text translation that focuses on understanding the original text and the writer's intentions is outlined. The approach uses a sequence of steps including: studying the text carefully, knowing the writer's background, analyzing the text, understanding the writer's use of words, normalizing the text's grammatical form, composing the ideas grammatically into the target language, homogenizing the translation's content, writing a draft translation, focusing on the writer's intention, and producing a final translation that is the equivalent of the original. The problems of translation and the value of this technique, especially for translation of metaphors, are illustrated in two English translations of a Dutch fairy tale, a literal translation and a "trustworthy" one using this approach. (MSE)

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TRANSLATIONS THAT YOU CAN TRUST

by Peter Attwood.

How often have you read an English translation that you did not completely trust?

A trustworthy translation is one that gives you confidence in the way that the writer's intentions have been transferred from one language to another without losing their meaning.

People express themselves in words in many different ways depending upon their backgrounds and the circumstances; words are used according to the writer's purpose and a translator has to understand that purpose as much as the subject itself. Consequently, the translator must understand what the writer really means, ideas have to be translated from a 'source language' into a 'target language' by transferring their meanings which is not the same as replacing words by other words.

The best translations will transfer an idea in the writer's mother-tongue into the equivalent idea in the translator's mother-tongue - anything less will feel artificial, as indeed it is. In fact, there is an Italian epigram that says "traddutore traditore" which literally means "the translator is a traitor". How true! Harald Weinrich of Heidelberg went further, saying: "translated words always lie, but translated texts only lie when they are badly translated".

Translating is a combination of science and art; therefore, it is really a craft. It is a science, because it makes an orderly arrangement of factual knowledge and tests it against an objective; and an art, because it requires the skills of creating and expressing something. Therefore, the scientific part involves getting to know the true facts from the text and arranging them to make the same sense in another language. The artistic part is the creation of a new text that is correct, readable and trustworthy in the 'target language'.

The scientific translation of words is fairly straightforward and it can be programmed on a computer but, what is not so easy, is giving the correct meaning to those words.

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Each word can have a range of meanings according to how it is used, or how it is spelled, or where it is positioned in the sentence, or what words are associated with it; as well as, the way it is interpreted by the writer and the reader. Their interpretation is very important, because the way that they see a word will reflect their personalities, their backgrounds and their own inferences.

It follows that translators will be traitors unless their translations do credit to both the writer and themselves. A translator must think like a scientist yet be creative like an artist, but this is asking a lot!

However, scientific thinking can be substituted by a logical translation method; although it is the largest and most important part, a scientific method can be learnt with practice and careful study. Now, I want to describe a method to you that has been used succesfully during the scientific part of translating but, unfortunately, the smaller artistic part will require your own interpretation and skills, plus the gift of expressing yourself effectively in words - which only comes with time. Science can be taught and learnt indirectly, but art has to be practised personally.

Here then, is my scientific translation method to which you have to add the artistic skills yourself.

THE "STAUNCHWAY" OF TRANSLATING LANGUAGES

"STAUNCHWAY" is an artificial word that represents the orderly sequence of steps for translating one language into another: "staunch" means "trustworthy"; therefore, the "staunchway" is a "trustworthy method".

The sequence of letters in "STAUNCHWAY" gives you the correct sequence of steps for translating a text and they are the following:

S tudy the text carefully
T uno yourself with the writer's background
A nalyse the text to be translated
U nderstand the writer's use of words
N ormalize the grammatical form of the text
C ompose the ideas grammatically into the new language
H omogenize the contents of the translation
W rite a draft translation
A greement with the writer's intention is vital
Y our final translation must be equivalent to the original.

[redacted] I will expand these steps in order to help you make a successful translation:

1. Studying the text carefully is the only way to understand it correctly in a meaningful way.
2. Tuning yourself with the writer's background requires, preferably, a face-to-face meeting; otherwise, you will have to find out all you can about the writer's background, the way the writer thinks, expresses ideas in words and his style of writing.
3. Analysing the text is the most important step: start by deciding the purpose and classify the text into (1) introduction, (2) central information, (3) conclusions. Then, make a list of the ideas, each with a subject and predicate, and assign them to the three headings; finally, arrange these classified ideas into a logical order.
4. Understanding the writer's use of words in the 'source language' and labelling the words - emotive, factual, or descriptive. Then, finding their equivalents in the 'target language', before regrouping them grammatically in order to make good sense in the new text.
5. Normalizing the grammatical form will ensure that the new text is standard and natural.
6. Composing the ideas grammatically will keep the original meanings although their forms are different; for instance, English always uses the past tense for past events; the present tense for current observations; and the future tense for speculations.
7. Homogenizing the contents for consistency is done by comparing the meaning of the original sentences with the translated sentences. Obviously, they will have been written at different times, in different languages and for different readers, but both should communicate the same message.
8. Writing a draft translation will help you to give cohesion to the final text and allow you to make any necessary alterations after comparing it with the original again.
9. Agreement with the writer's intentions will be confirmed by the writer's examination of the new text but, if this is not possible, by somebody who is familiar with the writer's views on the subject.

10. Your final translation will depend, ultimately, upon your personal interpretations and writing skill. It must include the equivalent meanings, style and inferences as the original text so that it has the same effect on its readers. You have to try and identify yourself with both, the readers of the original and the readers of your translation, in order to make sure that they are receiving the same message.

The last step is the most difficult, but it will be a measure of how well you have understood the original text and the writer's intentions, if the translation is free of your own opinions. Unless you are expressing the writer's ideas you will be writing your own personal review rather than a factual translation. It is a paradox that your translation has to help the reader to understand the writer's intentions and to trust your interpretation of them.

Now, I will illustrate this translation method with an example that explains what is meant by 'trustworthy'. It is very difficult to translate metaphors accurately from one language to another and this applies to fairy stories in particular. Consequently, a fairy story has been chosen for this example.

TRANSLATING LITERALLY
or
Translations that you cannot trust!

by Peter Attwood.

"Tom Thumb"

Here is a 'word for word' translation, from Dutch into English, of a well-known fairy story which includes many Dutch expressions which have completely different meanings metaphorically in English.

A Literal Translation

There was once a poor woodchopper. This woodchopping, he said one day to his woman, there sits no dry bread in it. I work myself an accident the whole day, but you and our twelve children have not to eat.
- I see the future dark in, his woman agreed.
- We must try to fit a sleeve on it, the woodchopper resumed; I have a plan: tomorrow we shall go on step with the children, and then, in the middle of the wood, we'll leave them to their fate over.
His woman almost went off her little stick when she heard this. What is there with you on the hand? she cried, aren't you good sob?
But the woodshopper wasn't brought off his piece by her wailing, he gave no shrink. It cannot differ to me what you think, he said. There sits nothing else on, tomorrow we leave them in the wood.
Little Thumbie, the youngest son, had listened off his parents' conversation. The next morning before day and dew he went out and filled his pockets with pebbles. During the walk into the wood he knew unmarked-up to drop them one by one. Then the parents told the children to sprockle some wood, and shined the plate.
When the parents didn't come for the day any more, the children understood that they had been left in the stitch. Soon the waterlanders appeared. But Thumbie said: don't sit down by your packages, I will sorrow for it that we all get home wholeskins. Thank be the pebbles he was able to find his way back.
- By God, the parents said as they turned up, how have you ragged him that? No art on, said Thumbie and let out what he had done. If you want to be rid of us you will have to stand up a bit earlier.
That is just what the parents did. This time there came no pebbles on to pass, all Thumbie had was a piece of dry bread.
He decided that his bread there then but must believe to it. He left a trail of breadcrumbs but he didn't have it in the holes that they were being made into soldiers by the birds.

His parents departed with the Northern sun, as on the day before, but this time Thumbie soon touched rid of the trail. What now? Good counsel was expensive. The sun was already under, it was raining pipestems and the crying stood Little Thumbie nearer than the laughing. At last he saw a tiny light through the trees; it turned out to be a house.
The lad who stood them to word was a giantess. She gave them what to eat but Little Thumbie received the feeling that something wasn't fluff. He

had understood that the giantess' man, the giant, was a people-eater who would see no bone in devouring them. If we do not pass up, he thought, we shall be the cigar; as soon as they saw their chance clean they took the legs and smeared him.

When the giant came home, he sniffed the air and bellowed: I smell people flesh! Woman, why have you let them go there from through? Bring me my seven-league boots, I go them behind after!
He was about to haul the children in, but, wonder above wonder, just then decided to lie down in order to snap a little owl.
- Shoot up, help me! Thumbie said to his brothers as soon as the giant lay there pipping, we must see to make him his seven-league boots off-handy. He squeezed him like an old thief but they went ahead and knew him to draw his boots out. Now we must make that we come away! Little Thumbie said.
He put on the boots and quickly made himself out of the feet, carrying his brothers along.
Also, he had seen chance to roll the giant's pockets and pick in all his gold pieces.
- How have you boxed that before each other? cried Thumbie's parents in amazement when showed up.
- It was a pod-skin, said little Thumbie modestly. I may be small but I stand my little man. And look, I have also brought a lot of poon. We used not to be able to allow ourselves billy-goat's leaps, but now we have our sheep on the dry. We will never come anything too short again! I shall be able to buy myself a nail-suit at last! And a woody-stringy!
- And I a soup-dress, cried his mother, they are you of it these days.
- Great, his father exculted. I shall buy us a motor-car.
That afternoon he came riding to the fore in a sled of a wagon. I seem to be having trouble riding straight out, Thumbie's father complained.
- That you thank the cuckoo, his woman said, you have a piece in your collar. You have him around again. I shall stop you in bed.
The next day all the children were stuck in the clothes as well. In her new soup-dress, mother looked a cleanliness.
After that, they moved to The Hague, where they bought a chest of a house on the New Explanation, and lived happily ever after.

Rudi Kousebroek
A Dutch newspaper journalist.

Note: You will laugh at this translation, because it is absolutely untrustworthy in English although the original Dutch metaphors can be understood easily by a native Dutch speaker.

The Original Dutch Text

Er was eens een arme houthakker. Dit houthakken, zei hij op een dag tegen zijn vrouw, er zit geen droog brood in. Ik werk mezelf een ongeluk maar jij en onze twaalf kinderen hebben niet te eten.
Ik zie de toekomst donker in, zijn vrouw was het ermee eens.
We moeten proberen er een mouw aan te passen, hervatte de houthakker. Ik

heb een plan, morgen zullen we op stap gaan met de kinderen en dan in het midden van het bos laten we ze aan hun lot over.
Zijn vrouw ging bijna van haar stokje. Wat is er met jou aan de hand, schreeuwde ze, ben je niet goed snik?
Maar de houthakker was niet van zijn stuk gebracht door haar gekerm, hij gaf geen krimp. Het kan me niet schelen wat je denkt zei hij. Er zit niets anders op, morgen laten we ze in het bos.
Klein Duimpje, de jongste zoon, had het gesprek van zijn ouders afgeluisterd. De volgende ochtend voor dag en dauw ging hij weg en vulde zijn zakken met kiezels. Tijdens de wandeling in het bos wist hij onopgemerkt ze een voor een te laten vallen. Toen zeiden de ouders de kinderen wat hout te sprokkelen, en poetsten de plaat.
Toen de ouders niet meer voor de dag kwamen begrepen de kinderen dat ze in de steek waren gelaten. Spoedig verschenen de waterlanders. Klein Duimpje zei: "zit niet bij de pakken neer. Ik zal ervoor zorgen dat we allemaal heelhuids thuiskomen". Dankzij de kiezels kon hij de weg terugvinden.
Bij God zeiden de ouders toen ze terug kwamen, hoe heb je hem dat gelapt. Geen kunst aan, zei Klein Duimpje en legde uit wat hij had gedaan. Als je van ons af wil, zul je wat eerder moeten opstaan.
Dit is precies wat de ouders deden. Deze keer kwamen er geen kiezelsteentjes aan te pas, alles wat Klein Duimpje had was een stuk droog brood. Hij besloot dat zijn brood er dan maar aan moest geloven. Hij liet een spoor van broodkruimels achter maar hij had niet in de gaten dat ze door de vogels soldaat werden gemaakt.
Zijn ouders vertrokken met de Noorderzon, zoals de dag tevoren, maar deze keer raakte Klein Duimpje spoedig het spoor kwijt.
Wat nu? Goede raad was duur, de zon was al onder, het regende pijpestelen en het huilen stond Klein Duimpje nader dan het lachen. Tenslotte zag hij een heel klein lichtje door de bomen; het bleek een huis te zijn.
De dame die hen te woord stond was een reuzin. Ze gaf ze wat te eten, maar Klein Duimpje kreeg het gevoel dat er iets niet pluis was. Hij had begrepen dat de man van de reuzin, de reus, een menseneter was die er geen been in zag ze op te eten. Als we niet oppassen, dacht hij, zijn we de sigaar; zodra ze hun kans schoonzagen namen ze de benen en smeerden hem.
Toen de reus thuiskwam, snoof hij de lucht en bulderde: ik ruik mensenvlees! Vrouw, waarom heb je ze er vandoor laten gaan? Breng me mijn zevenmijlslaarzen, ik ga ze achterna.
Hij stond op het punt de kinderen in te halen, maar wonder boven wonder, juist toen besloot hij te gaan liggen om een uiltje te knappen.
Schiet op, help me! zei Klein Duimpje tegen zijn broers, zodra de reus daar lag te pitten, we moeten zien hem de zevenmijlslaarzen afhandig te maken. Hij kneep hem als een oude dief, maar ze gingen door en wisten hem zijn laarzen uit te trekken. Nu moeten we maken dat we weg komen, zei Klein Duimpje.
Hij deed de laarzen aan en maakte zich uit de voeten en nam zijn broers mee. Ook had hij kans gezien de reus zijn zakken te rollen en al zijn goudstukken te pikken.
Hoe heb je dat voor elkaar gebokst, riepen de ouders van Klein Duimpje verbaasd toen hij er weer was.
Het was een peuleschilletje zei Klein Duimpje bescheiden. Ik mag dan wel klein zijn maar ik sta mijn mannetje. En kijk, ik heb ook een heleboel poen meegebracht. Vroeger konden we ons geen bokkeprongen veroorloven, maar nu hebbenwe onze schaapjes op het droge. We zullen nooit meer iets tekortkomen. Ik zal eindelijk een spijkerpak kunnen kopen! En een houtje-touwtje.

En ik een soepjurk, riep zijn moeder uit, ze zijn je van het tegenwoordig.
Fantastisch jubelde zijn vader. Ik zal een auto kopen. Die middag kwam hij in een grote slee aanrijden. Het lijkt wel of ik moeite heb met rechtuit rijden, klaagde de vader van Klein Duimpje.
Dat dank je de koekoek, zei zijn vrouw. Je hebt een stuk in je kraag. Je hebt hem weer om. Ik zal je in bed stoppen.
De volgende dag werden ook alle kinderen in nieuwe kleren gestoken,. In haar nieuwe jurk zag moeder eruit als een schoonheid.
Daarna verhuisden ze naar Den Haag, waar ze een kast van een huis kochten op de Nieuwe Uitleg en ze leefden nog lang en gelukkig.

Marianne van Rees Vellinga.

A metaphoric fairy story in Dutch, based upon an article by Dr. Hugo Brandt Corstius in the N.R.C. 1979.

Note: It is impossible to make a sensible translation in English of this story unless you are familiar with its metaphors in both Dutch and English. However, the translation will be most trustworthy when everyday expressions are used instead of the equivalent metaphors.

A Trustworthy English Translation

Once upon a time, there was a poor wood-cutter who said to his wife: "We do not have enough money to feed and clothe our family. I work all hours of the day, yet you and our twelve children still do not get enough to eat. The future looks bleak for us".
His wife agreed saying: "We must do something about it." Her husband replied that he had a plan: "Tomorrow, we will take the children for an outing into the forest where I work; then, we will leave them in the middle so that they cannot find their way home."
His wife nearly had a fit when she heard this. "What is the matter with you" she cried, "Have you gone out of your mind?" However, the wood-cutter was not deterred by her outcry and would not change his plan. "I am afraid that we do not have any choice" he informed her: "Tomorrow, we will leave them in the forest".
Their conversation had been overheard by Little Tom Thumb, the youngest son; so, he got up early next morning and filled his pockets with small stones. When the family set out through the forest, he secretly dropped the stones, one by one, without being observed. Deep in the forest, the children were told to go and collect firewood and while they were away, the parents quietly disappeared.
Later in the day, when their parents did not return, the children realised that they had been left to their fate. They were afraid and began to cry; all except Tom Thumb who told them: "Cheer up, I will see to it that we get home safely." This he did, thanks to the small stones that showed him the way.

"Good God!" exclaimed his parents when the children arrived home. "How on earth did you find your way back?" "I kept my eyes open" replied Tom Thumb, as he explained to them what he had done. "If you want to get rid of us, you will have to find a better ruse than that!"
As a result, the wood-cutter took no chances, next time, and he made sure that the children did not have anything that could be used to help them. However, Tom Thumb did have a slice of dry bread for his lunch and he decided that it would have to be sacrificed. He carefully broke it into little pieces in his pocket so that he could drop the breadcrumbs along the way. Unfortunately, he did not notice the birds that came down and ate the breadcrumbs. Once again, the parents sent the children to collect firewood and left them in the forest.
"Follow me!" cried Tom Thumb as he looked for his trail of breadcrumbs; unfortunately the trail soon came to an end and they were lost.
The sun went in and dark clouds filled the sky. Soon, the rain beat down on them and even Tom Thumb was on the verge of tears. He did not know what to do, but suddenly, he spotted a glimmer of light shining through the trees. It seemed to be coming from a house and the children hurried towards it.
In the doorway stood a huge woman and she fetched the children something to eat when she saw their plight. Tom Thumb felt ill at ease, because he had heard that a giant who ate children lived in a house in the forest. "If this is the house" he thought, "we have had it". So he persuaded the others to leave the house with him.
It was not long before the giant returned and he sniffed the air. "Ho ho! I smell children" he bellowed to his wife: "Why did you let them go? Bring me my magic boots and I will run after them!" Later, he felt very tired after storming through the forest, so he sat down to have a nap. Tom Thumb heard the giant's snores; therefore, he and his brothers crept back to steal the magic boots. Feeling scared stiff, they quietly removed the boots while Tom Thumb also helped himself to the giant's wallet which was full of money.
With the aid of the magic boots, Tom Thumb found the way out of the forest and managed to get home with the children.
"So you are back again!" cried the wood-cutter in amazement. "Yes and we are rich this time" replied Tom Thumb modestly. "Now, we will be able to afford plenty of food and luxuries too! I shall buy myself a decent suit of clothes and a duffle coat." "And I want a full-length dress" declared his mother, "they are all the fashion nowadays." "Terrific" said his father, "I will buy a new Volvo car!"
That afternoon, the wood-cutter was as good as his word, and he drove up in a posh limousine. "It doesn't steer very well" he stammered as he zigzagged down the road. "You spent too long in the pub!" answered his wife: "You are drunk and I will have to put you to bed."
The next day, she bought some food and lots of new clothes for the children; whilst, she herself looked stunning in her fashionable dress. The family moved to The Hague, subsequently, into a large detached house on the New Road where they lived happily ever after.

Peter Attwood
Eindhoven University of Technology.

Note: It is important to translate the ideas behind the words rather than the words themselves! Some metaphors have been retained in order to give the story character and retain the reader's interest.

As a matter of interest, many metaphors are similar in Dutch and English, but some are not. For example, in the first paragraph of this story, the literal translation of "er zit geen droog brood in" is "there sits no dry bread in it", which is funny to an Englishman!
However, the equivalent English metaphor is "we cannot keep body and soul together" and its literal translation into Dutch would make a Dutchman laugh!

Therefore, a translation is most likely to be trusted when a metaphor is replaced by an everyday expression..... in the case above, by: "we do not have enough money to feed and clothe our family".